

# History in the Making

---

Volume 1

Article 9

---

2008

## Emperor! By Dr. Lanny Fields

Holly Roy  
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

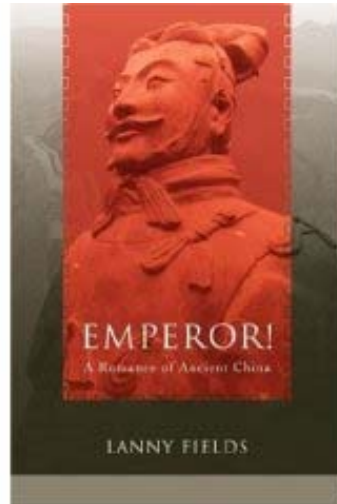
Roy, Holly (2008) "Emperor! By Dr. Lanny Fields," *History in the Making*: Vol. 1 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol1/iss1/9>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Arthur E. Nelson University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

## **Book Review**

### ***Emperor!* By Dr. Lanny Fields**

**Holly Roy**



*Emperor!* by Lanny Fields, is a romance of Ancient China which highlights the reign of the first emperor, Ying Jeng. The time period covered is 238-210 BCE, with added insights from 98-96 BCE in the voice of Su Ma, China's famed historian. The book is a more of a historical novel than anything, blending historical research with informed imagination to bring the lives and world of ancient Chinese characters to life.

Within the narrative there are three basic story lines. The first covers the life of Emperor Jeng and his closest acquaintances. It begins at the time of Jeng's father's death and his subsequent acceptance of the throne. Fields

documents the many campaigns taken on by the first emperor and concludes with his death and extravagant burial in 210.

The second story line revolves around Marcus Scipio and Ming Tien, an ex-Roman soldier and nun-turned-scholar, respectively. The Roman's affinity for Chinese culture leads him through the pains of self-discovery, love, and loss. Their story is heart wrenching and inspiring, and is the highlight of the book.

The third major story follows the Reds, a gang of thieves and pimps led initially by a dwarf who "adopts" a young boy, Tao. Old Juang, the boss, trains Tao to succeed him in running the crime syndicate, converting the young boy from an innocent child to a cold, greedy criminal.

The purpose of the book is to dramatize and make accessible the life and times of the first Emperor and his contemporaries. Fields achieves much by humanizing the eccentric and brutal Ying Jeng. He places the emperor in the context of the period, and shows that he had a life which included daily interaction with family, friends and foes. Using imagined characters as well as historical figures, Fields presents authors with what he imagines to be the day to day lives of characters often lost in more historically accurate yet dryer accounts of ancient Chinese dynastic elite.

What makes *Emperor!* unique is its short chapters, 152 of them, including the Prologue and Epilogue. The chapters jump back and forth

between characters, keeping the pace of the book rapid-fire if sometimes chaotic. This style is simultaneously helpful and confusing for the reader. On one hand, the reader is able to keep track of the many characters and stories because of the organization of the chapters. It is easy to reference back if details are forgotten. However, as the story progresses, many chapters seem out of place or leave the reader hanging. This hurts the flow of the piece, especially at the end of a good chapter. The reader wants to know the rest of the story, but is left with only a teaser. This is not to say that the reader is unable to follow the plot, but combining some of the chapters would create a better flow.

Overall, *Emperor!* is an accessible way to learn history. Readers do not need an extensive knowledge of Ancient China to enjoy Fields' narrative. The inclusion of the humanistic themes of love, loss, and self-discovery make the book appealing to readers of many backgrounds.

The major criticism that can be asserted is that the author takes unusual license with historical facts, inventing some characters, particularly to imagine the lives of gangs in the absence of available historical data. However, with knowledge that this book is a representation of both historical fiction and historical fact, an otherwise accessible topic comes to life and leaves the reader wanting to know more about ancient Chinese history.

Fields' contribution to the field of history is important because it sparks an interest in looking at historical facts from another angle and with an imaginative twist. His work challenges readers to think critically about the commonly accepted narratives and to recognize the humanity in people who lived so long ago.

